



Winery & Vineyards

2003 PINOT NOIR

“Grand Cuvee”

Central (gasp!) Coast

Winemaker's Notes:

If buttercups buzz'd after the bee,
If boats were on land, churches on sea,
If ponies rode men and if grass ate the cows,
And cats should be chased into holes by the mouse,
If mamas sold their babies
To the gypsies for half a crown;
If summer were spring and the other way around,
Then all the world would be upside down.

The World Turned Upside Down is a humorous revolutionary war tune that I came across years ago in my studying of U.S. history. In its era, it became popular after it was played by musicians in the ranks of the British army as they marched onto the surrender field after their defeat at Yorktown. The song was a reflection of the bitter irony and confusion suffered by the British as the result of their loss to what was essentially a ragtag bunch of volunteer colonists. Highly trained, heavily armed, well funded armies are not supposed to lose to amateurs. Likewise, the best Pinot Noir in my cellar is *not* supposed to be from Monterey County. It's supposed to be from Santa Barbara County's hallowed ground. It's supposed to be from the Santa Rita Hills, and when it isn't, it just doesn't make any sense.

My vision a few years ago seemed crystal clear. My reserve Pinot Noir program was to become a pure expression of our sublime new appellation. After all, with vineyards like Mt. Carmel and Cargasacchi near by, it would be a no-brainer to simply blend a little bit of their fruit in with my fruit, and consistently make a stupendous reserve wine. Done deal. But in 2003 an interesting thing happened.

By this time the price for Pinot Noir grapes in the Santa Rita Hills had hit a level that one might describe as *out of control*. In a nutshell, when grapes sell for \$3,000 per ton and up, it is all but impossible to make them into a wine that retails for under \$20 per bottle. Impossible, that is, unless you plan on doing so at a loss. So, in my attempt to deliver a good wine in my moderately priced “Tri-Counties” Pinot program, I went up to Monterey County to procure some good quality, reasonably priced fruit. Procure I did, and in 2003 some grapes grown in the decomposed granite soil of the “Granite's Ghost” section of the Riverview Vineyard, east of Soledad, made the best Pinot Noir in my Cellar. Actually, the Cargasacchi fruit may have been the best, by a hair. But, the problem with the Cargasacchi in 2003 was that there was not enough of it to significantly impact the Grand Cuvee blend.

So here is the scene as I stood in my lab a couple of years ago with my assistant winemakers as we attempted to finalize the master blend for the 2003 Grand Cuvee. As they tasted through the five or so unmarked samples, I asked them, “So, what's your favorite?” It was unanimous. The cuvee that we all liked the best was the one with a big chunk of Granite's Ghost blended in. But my guys did not know that there was Monterey County wine in this potential blend. When I told them, they freaked, “You're not going to blend Monterey fruit into the Grand Cuvee, are you? You?... The purist?... The terroir guy?... Dude, it just ain't right!”

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“Well, you call yourselves winemakers?” I asked. “Be honest. What’s the best blend? Are we delivering, good appellation or good wine?” It was the look on their faces at that point, half confusion, half pain that made me think to myself, “How does that song go again; something about how the world gets turned upside down?”

Honestly, I am not planning on doing this every year. In fact, the 2004 Grand Cuvee Pinot Noir now in barrels is all Santa Rita Hills. Is there a great 2004 wine from Granite’s Ghost in barrels? Potentially, and I am considering bottling some of it by itself. If so, the irony and the embarrassment might continue if the ’04 Granite’s Ghost is better than the ’04 Grand Cuvee. But that’s O.K. I like a little competition. It keeps me on my toes.

At this juncture, the 2003 Grand Cuvee is quite dark, with an almost blackish garnet hue. The nose is spicy with a pretty intense suggestion of earthy forest floor. It’s elusive, but the nose also seems to be hinting at smoked pork, with a floral aspect that may be headed toward violets. The mouth is bone dry with a flavor of stewed cherries. Its youthful tannins play nicely into the earthiness of the nose. Please excuse the wine geek in me, but this is a complex wine to say the least, and with characters like Miles in the movie *Sideways* gloriously discussing the haunting, more enigmatic side of Pinot Noir, the timing on this one could not be better.

Technical Notes:

100% Pinot Noir, Central Coast

VINEYARDS:

54% Babcock Estate, Santa Barbara County, *Santa Rita Hills*

33% Scheid Corporation, River View Vineyard, “Granite’s Ghost” section, Monterey Cty

13% Cargasacchi Vineyard, Santa Barbara County, *Santa Rita Hills*

VINIFICATION:

Open-top fermenters, cap punched down daily, 10-day maceration

TIME IN BARRELS:

10 months, 50% new French oak, 50% seasoned French oak

TA: 7.3 g/L pH: 3.60 g/L ALCOHOL: 13.5%

PRODUCTION: 1,184 cases 12/750ml

BOTTLING DATE: August, 2004

RELEASE DATE: March 1st, 2005